

CASE STUDY

Following is a case study demonstrating how to perform an informal assessment and use those findings to create a CRS that will serve as an important transition document when this student leaves school and begins adult life.

Carol is a 15-year-old female with a diagnosis of autism and moderate mental retardation. She stands approximately 5'7" and is slightly overweight. Carol currently attends middle school and is in a combination of self-contained and inclusion classes during the academic day. She has a very close relationship with her mother and enjoys bowling, playing games, and watching movies.

Carol responds well to written instructions and uses a written schedule to complete her tasks, but she has some difficulty with verbal instruction. When verbal instructions are used, Carol often needs additional instruction before she clearly understands her task. She often becomes anxious and engages in inappropriate behaviors when she does not clearly understand what is expected of her.

Carol's language patterns reflect her difficulty in taking the perspective of others. She often speaks of herself in the second person or third person. For example, if Carol needs to use the restroom she would state, "You need to go to the bathroom." Or if she does not want to complete an activity she would state, "You don't want to do that." Most of Carol's language appears to be in the form of questions she has internalized. Because of her problems taking the perspective of others, she repeats these questions exactly as she heard them rather than changing the point of view. Carol initiates very little conversation. She responds when asked questions, but will often respond inappropriately.

Carol's receptive language ability is marked by the fact that she processes information slowly. She often answers, "Yes," to questions that require more complex answers because she has not yet fully processed the question, but she will often correct her answer once she has had time to do so. Carol sometimes becomes frustrated if she is asked several questions consecutively. When this happens, she becomes agitated and at times may even begin to cry.

Carol demonstrates a strong social interest but does not possess the skills necessary to successfully navigate social interactions. She often approaches strangers and asks their names. She also engages in a variety of inappropriate social behaviors, including making spontaneous loud noises and making repetitive inappropriate comments. Carol seems to enjoy the attention she receives when she engages in these behaviors.

Carol tends to be highly distracted by other people in her work area. She requires a good deal of verbal prompting and redirection to remain on task. Her level of distraction is especially high when she begins a new task. Once Carol is thoroughly engaged in an activity, however, she is able to work for significant periods of time without staff interaction.

From our formal assessment using the TTAP and a review of her performance in the classroom, we know that Carol has some strengths in the area of clerical skills. Because it is an area of competence and interest to her, the IEP team decided to provide her with a 9-week period of instruction in a school-based clerical site. She is first taken to the school office for an assessment of her skills in that setting. The office is a very busy place with approximately four employees who are performing various duties. There

are frequent visitors who come in and ask questions or are seeking information. Carol's tasks in this setting are to use the computer to type weekly announcements to the teachers, to make copies for teachers and administrators, to do some filing, and to distribute the mail.

Before Carol is ever taken to the office setting, the teacher or job coach visited the community site and made an assessment of the environment and physical layout. This information, combined with what has already been learned about Carol's needs either through the formal section of the TTAP or in the classroom setting, may help in determining whether or not this will be an appropriate setting for her. After observing that the site does pose some potential problems for Carol (in particular, too many distractions by people in the work area), the teacher or job coach makes the determination that with some simple changes to the physical structure and the times she is to work in the office, Carol will have a greater chance of success.

The teacher also determines during assessment that Carol would perform better with a visual list that clarifies the sequence of steps in the task. The teacher notes that the list should instruct Carol to close the door when she starts work. This environmental modification will help improve her performance in the office setting by keeping her attention focused on the task instead of on the people who enter the main office.

Based upon her observations of Carol in this environment, the teacher notes that Carol is too distracted when large numbers of people enter the copy room or the main office. The teacher then decides that in order for Carol to have the greatest chance of

mastering the targeted skills in this community setting, she needs to perform them at times of day when fewer personnel are in the office. After talking with the office manager to determine the least busy times, the teacher arranges for Carol to complete these jobs from 9:50-11:20 a.m. three days a week when only an occasional staff member is likely to come into the copy room. The teacher also suggests putting a “Drop Off” box at the door of the copy room for teachers and staff to put their copy/collate orders. The teacher creates a blue “Copy Form” that allows teachers to check off what they need copied or collated. This makes it easier for Carol to understand what to do.

The teacher knows from previous assessment that Carol will have trouble reading handwritten notes from teachers and that this will slow her performance. Because Carol’s typing in the office proves to be slower than her classroom performance, the teacher recognizes that dealing with the distractions of a new environment and typing handwritten notes (written by a variety of people) is too much to ask of Carol. The teacher decides to try to expand on Carol’s skills by changing the typing context in the classroom, moving Carol’s typing desk into a more open spot (see bottom of Figure 9). She will also provide a written list for Carol that breaks down the steps of typing into checking for capitalization, checking for punctuation, and putting her finished work in a separate container that will later go to the office. Finally, the teacher will present Carol with memos to be typed from a limited variety of styles (handwritten and typed) to further assess whether practice helps her interpret memos.

It is also noted that Carol struggled with social interactions and appropriate topics of conversation. She frequently tried to gain the attention of other staff members when she should have been working or when they were working. The teacher decides to

provide a specific time when Carol can talk to the office staff for five minutes and, after checking with the staff, puts this item at the end of Carol's work period. She also prepares a list of acceptable topics and guidelines for conversation that Carol will use during these breaks to prevent her discussion of certain embarrassing subjects.